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Security Information

4. Estimate of the Situation

a. It has long been estimated that one of the most promising opportunities to make real progress toward our national objectives with respect to the Soviet system would arise following the death of Stalin. The inescapable necessity of transferring power to new hands, no matter how careful the preparations for it, has created a time of crisis for the Soviet Union and the Soviet system as a whole. We should not be misled by the apparently smooth transfer of power. A despotism can be ruled only by a despot and history is strewn with unsuccessful efforts to replace a tyrant with a committee. There is a real question whether Malenkov (or anyone else) will be able to bring or maintain all of the power factors under his iron control as Stalin did.

b. Among the facts which have already emerged, the following are of particular significance in developing a program of psychological operations designed to support our national effort to make progress toward our objectives:

(1) The accession to power of the new regime has been executed in a dramatically rapid and apparently resolute manner. This development and the announced change in governmental structure, indicate careful preparation and premeditation.

(2) The reorganization of the party and governmental apparatus is on lines almost identical to the organization employed during World War II. This points clearly to an effort to concentrate power in a manageably small number of hands and to present, both internally and externally, an impression of hardness and unity and continuity at the top.

(3) The following three features of the reorganization deserve special mention. First, the new regime is clearly at pains to strengthen its control over the military and to bid for its loyalty, as is seen by the prominent role given to military men and particularly by the Zhukov assignment. Second, the recently criticized internal security apparatus has been consolidated and placed for all to see in the hands of the most experienced and ruthless policeman of them all -- Beria. Third, there has been an extensive regrouping and consolidation of industrial and transportation and economic ministries, with control being placed in the hands of a few lieutenants.

(4) The initial pronouncements by the new regime stress the leading role played by the Great Russian people. This suggests that the regime will continue to base its physical and ideological strength on the Great Russians and that the regime may fear that the non-Russian Republics as well as the satellite states are of doubtful reliability and may have to be held in line by increasingly tight measures of repression. The fact that Stalin was a Georgian and Malenkov is a Great Russian may have symbolic significance in this connection.

(5) Beyond this, there is nothing at the present time which suggests a change, or the nature of a change if one is contemplated, in the conduct of foreign and domestic policies. Barring the drastic intensification of internal or external strains there appears little likelihood of such changes at an early date.

c. On the other hand, the very rapidity with which the transfer of power has been effected, the nature of this change, and the stringency of

the controls that have been imposed, together with the speed with which Stalin is to be interred and the warnings against disorder and panic, suggest that nervousness and concern over the stability of the new regime are prevalent at the highest levels and that, as regards Malenkov particularly, the effort to consolidate both the power of the regime and his control over it is the overriding preoccupation.

d. It is probably safe to assume, therefore, that the regime hopes to avoid serious external difficulties until it has consolidated its power or unless a struggle for power develops in such a way that one aspirant or another sees an opportunity to advance his interests by pursuing an aggressive and adventurous course. However, it is also in the nature of such a new regime that it must display its hardness or, to state it negatively, that it must avoid any sign of weakness. On balance, therefore, it is concluded that:

- (1) the regime is unlikely to undertake any rash actions or dramatic new initiatives for some time.
- (2) the new rulers are likely to be more "royalist than the king" in adhering rigidly for the time being to the policies laid down by Stalin.
- (3) the new rulers will react promptly, sharply, and perhaps even excessively to any external threats.

e. The evidence available to date suggests that the regime may be particularly concerned about:

- (1) the loyalty and subservience of the satellite regimes.
- (2) the loyalty of the army.

(3) internal security.

(4) the attitudes of minority nationalities in the USSR.

f. Regardless of its overt attitudes toward the outside world, the basic concern of the new regime and of Malenkov in particular is with the consolidation of the internal position. It is probable, moreover, that barring serious external problems of such a new character that they are not covered by the policies established by Stalin, serious friction within the regime is more likely to arise over domestic issues than over any other issues.